

Volunteerism

Should an employee take annual leave or administrative leave?

United States Office of Personnel Management

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EXCUSED ABSENCES FOR VOLUNTEER WORK QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q. What are the current civil service practices on granting excused absences for volunteer activities?

A. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) just released (October 1998) a report to the President on the efforts of Federal departments and agencies to expand citizen service opportunities for Federal employees... The willingness to use excused absence in support of volunteer activities varied among agencies. Twenty-three of 57 reporting agencies granted excused absences under limited circumstances. The typical amount granted was four hours per month when the community service must be performed during working hours, i.e., volunteering at public schools, and only after the use of other types of time off (annual leave, credit hours, compensatory time and leave without pay) had been considered. One agency's employees donated their lunch periods to tutor students and the agency granted up to 52 hours of excused absences a year for transit time to and from the schools.

Agencies noted that paying employees to perform community service raises the question of whether such an activity is truly volunteering. Therefore, granting excused absences to encourage community service is done "sparingly and judiciously". The most frequently cited adjustments to accommodating time off for community service were scheduling flexibilities and granting leave. The use of alternative work schedule, credit hours, work at home, annual leave, compensatory time and leave without pay were the typical tools used to achieve the President's goals.

Q. What regulatory guidance covers the use of excused absences in the Federal sector?

A. 5 CFR 610.301-306 applies to daily, hourly and piecework, i.e., blue-collar employees. General guidance for employees that are paid on an annual basis, i.e., General Schedule, is generated by Comptroller General decisions.

Q. Based on Comptroller General decisions, what is the general criteria for excused absences of General Schedule employees?

A. Any absence that enhances the development of professional job-related skills; furthers the agency's programs; or is officially sponsored or sanctioned by the agency. Precedent decisions envision that the periods of excused absence would normally not exceed three days per excused absence.

Q. Other than the Comptroller General's basic guidance, what are the specific procedures governing the granting of excused absences to General Schedule employees?

A. Agency granting of excused absences is discretionary. Whether to grant excused absences for appropriate reasons (consistent with Comptroller General decisions), and, if granted, for what frequency, duration and level of justification and approval can vary from agency to agency.

Q. What impact will individual agency discretionary practices have on San Francisco Bay Area Federal Executive Board (FEB) sponsored participation in a voluntary community service program?

A. Each agency will have to follow its own criteria and procedures for granting excused absences to General Schedule employees. Therefore, depending on the employing agency, it would be possible for variations in who or who isn't granted excused absences and/or the duration of those excused absences for participation by volunteering employees.

Q. Can a Federal Executive Board sponsored formal partnership with a school or schools be considered equivalent in intent to current guidance references to individual "agency" partnerships?

A. Yes. The nature and extent of participation is discretionary with each member agency. www.gsa.gov/r9feb